Kay

OPEN FORUM

Mess Hall #1
October 10, 1942

7:50 p.m.--9:40 p.m.

The chairman of the meeting was Mr. Charles Ferguson, Supervisor of Adult Education. Approximately thirty people were present. The two main speakers were Mr. Chauncey Alexander and Mr. Frank Wilkinson. The former is a psychiatric social worker at the Patton Institution. The latter was Manager of the Hacienda Village which is located near Watts. The Village was composed of Negroes, Mexican Caucasians, and white Caucasians. Later he managed the Ramona Gardens located near the Boyle Heights district of Los Angeles. The men were here to discuss problems which are common to minority groups in the United States.

Mr. Chauncey Alexander (7:52-8:10)

The first speaker was Mr. Alexander who began by stating that he desired participation in the latter discussion by the people present. He wanted to give a slight conception of the abnormal conditions in which we now find ourselves.

The first thing was to spend a little time with the problem of evacuation itself. Mr. Alexander stated that it was psychologically demoralizing for one minority group to be set aside and discriminated against as such. Through such conditions, he said that he could visualize a gradual breakdown of families and the uprooting of family ties.

There are very many abnormalities connected with such a situation. These are expressed particularly in children who may have temper tantrums or indulge in bed-wetting. Also these abnormalities tend to aggravate tension already existing in the communities in which the minority groups have been residing. The reaction upon the older groups is that they will point out to the younger people that they are living in an environment which is turning or has turned against them. The youth in turn have a chance of breaking down mentally.

Now the question is: would the above cause more mental cases than usual? There are two schools of thought. One is that a mental breakdown can result from the conditions surrounding the person; the other is that it may be precipitated by the environment.

There is no need to point out the abnormalities of this present situation. Everyone encounters strange people and is offered very poor facilities. Through observation from the psycho therapeutic point of view, it is seen that the problem is that of morale--both morale of the individual and of the group. One of the main motivating factors is fear, of which there are two types. The first is fear of the unknown, and the second is fear of the known.

In regard to fear of the unknown, the mental state of anxiety, bewilderment, and frustration may lead to cause breakdown. The best method of attack is to handle fear as a known thing. As an example, the bombing of Madrid, Spain, was cited. The city was bombed everyday; however, after the people learned of the situation and knew of the coming bombings they took a more or less fatalistic point of view. In this way, by putting the fear in the open, they avoided mental breakdown. That is the best way of attacking it. In the case of unknown fears, the persons are always ill at ease, and they worry constantly. This is conducive to mental illness, and it may precipitate mental illness in a psychotic way; whereas, in the case of a fear brought out in the open, the persons may become psycho neurotic.

The best way to combat the abnormality of the above situation is to find out why the Japanese people are here. One method would be to show how this situation is correlated with the national scene. The people who know the facts realize that this is a war for the common people; it is a fight against Facism. Democracy is not a thing which is to be had, but it is something which is always advancing. The Negro group having realized this has become highly socialized and are now working diligently towards their acceptance by everyone! The Mexican group, in the other hand, form into gangs, and at the present time, there are many cases of gang fights and killings. These problems lie within the province of those who are pro-democratic in feeling so that they may assist in the alleviating of this situation. Progressive forces are now being seen--an example of which is the Fair Unemployment Union. Another example is the fact that some unions are being taken into the Government.

The Japanese have a contribution to give towards the war effort. They are skilled in many fields and they can act in administrative capacities. Participation also means a greater guarantee for the future for them. By means of putting the problems in front of the people, it can serve to break introvertic groups. A large part of the responsibility lies on the Government; it cannot stand idly aside. The Government has to offer substantial security by showing a definite plan--a security for the future. The Government should display the fact that assimilation will definitely aid plans for the future.

Mr. Frank Wilkinson (8:10--8:35)

The main thing which Mr. Wilkinson wanted to do was to find the root of the evil--the basic common problems which confront all minority groups. These are problems which the common people all over the world have.

Unusual situations have developed in Los Angeles other than those involving Japanese. The basic purposes of this war has taken away the underlying ideas of conflicts wherein one minority group is pitted against another merely for the purpose of lowering wage scales. Furthermore in order to further the war effort, everyone, regardless of racial background, must be used.

These changes in trends of thought can be viewed very easily in the housing situation--for example, at the Hacienda Village. The residents were composed of one-third Negroes, one-third Non-Mexican Caucasians, and one-third Mexican Caucasinas. The majority of these residents are war workers who have arrived from all over the United States. The nomenclature of non-Mexican and Mexican Caucasians was then made clear. The reason for this distinction is that Mexicans are also Caucasians. This terminology is always used at the Hacienda Village.

While Mr. Wilkinson was manager of the Village, many queer cases were referred to him. One Southerner wanted to know whether Negores would be segregated from the rest of the residents. The answer which was given was that the western attitude will be kept in that there will be no segregation on color standards. The housing program was to show one phase of democratic control. This Southerner was forced by necessity to live in the Hacienda Village with mixed racial groups because he could not find another lodging place suitable to him. Another oddity was that the Negroes desired to know whether the Jewish people would be segregated or whether they will have to live in the same building. Within three or four months, the Hacienda Village grew and by the time the place became fully occupied, the residence was composed of one-third Negro, one-third non-Mexican Caucasians, and one-third Mexican Caucasians. These were all mixed up together with small racial groups. Not many incidents occurred at the Village; however, some white people called colored people, "niggers"; the Negro people called the Mexican people, "greasers"; and the Negro and the Mexican people called the non-Mexican Caucasians, "white toothpicks."

There arose a need for a nursery school at the Hacienda Village. This is because of the influx of women in war work. The building to house the nursery was available if only the people could organize to help with the supervision. Two or three ladies went to the manager's office stating that they were interested in the idea. From that beginning a meeting was held for all of the villagers to work out this necessary common problem. This meeting was attended by eighty to one hundred adults who did not sit in racial groups but who sat scatteredly through necessity and also partly by choice. At that meeting, a Dr. Edith Woods said that the project would be possible if enough money could be raised to purchase the essentials.

A Negro who was very active in a C.I.O. trade movement stood up and expounded on the need for a chairman. The manager recommended that this person himself be chairman. The people applauded this suggestion; therefore, the meeting was conducted henceforth by a Negro leader. It was decided that a nine-man committee be formed to carry on the work. This committee was composed of three Negroes, three non-Mexican Caucasians, and three Mexican Caucasians.

A dance committee was then selected using the same ratio of 3-3-3. The orchestra, composed of ten people, was also of mixed racial groups. Everything ran smoothly; the dance worked out beautifully. It was attended by from about one hundred to 150 people who had an enjoyable time. At first, there was a slight interval where tension was felt and people began to worry about the racial problem with which they were confronted. As an ice breaker the gentlemen were lined against one wall and the ladies were lined against the opposite wall. The ladies took offftheir shoes and threw them to the line of gentlemen. Each took off their shoes and threw them to the line of gentlemen. Each gentleman picked up a shoe and found the person to whom the shoe belonged. This avoided friction. Everyone was in good spirits and they mixed well.

The idea of community help was carried out and the plans for the nursery were eventually realized. When Mr. Wilkinson left the Hacienda Village, everything was running smoothly. The residents paid no regard to color or to different groups.

The situation at the Ramona Gardens Project was a little different. The people there suffered from a lack of economic opportunities. Ramona Gardens was composed of approximately 4,000 people whose average income was between sixty and eighty dollars per month. As a whole, the people lacked sufficient education when they were young. They also suffered so much from their own economic conditions that they did not feel and they were not treated as equals in the labor market. They felt insecure economically; therefore, their problem was accentuated and they tended towards feeling anti-Semitic, anti-Mexican, and anti-White, depending upon which racial group they belonged The basic frustration cannot be helped in this case because it is very difficult to assist in economic insecurities. The question at hand is: "What is the basic thing behind minority problems?" Miss Genevieve Baird interrupted to say, "I cannot see the point of forcing people to live together." Referring to Negroes as "niggers" she declared that she couldn't see why "nigger" children should be allowed to play with other children.

Mr. Wilkinson then discussed the Rose Hill project where the majority of the residents (approximately 80%) were Mexicans. With the coming of the project, the Rose Hill gang declines. The value of property surrounding Rose Hill steadily rose.

Mr. Alexander stated that there is no innate disposition to display racial groups. The display can come about because of conditioning. As an example of this conditioning of display, the case of the Southerner's display of colored people was brought out. There the tenant farmers played prejudices against the Negroes. It was pointed out that someone gained by it. Again it was stressed that Democracy is not a static condition; it is a growing thing. Therefore, conditioning and reasoning factors enter into the picture of the promotion of democratic ideals.

Mrs. Nace Satterlee (8:50 p.m.) began a heated discussion of the Jewish problem. She had the gall to spout forth her theory that the reason behind anti-Semitic feelings was that aesthetically speaking their characteristics were not pleasing. Then she went on to state that certain types of beauty such as that of the Greeks lived throughout the ages. Apparently, there was no connection, but she seemed to get her own point; no one else did. Then, she delved into the appreciation of great musical pieces (which, again was much off the track). She had the nerve to state that Jewish people as a whole belong to the least beautiful of all races. This precipitated a healthy discussion of the Jewish people and aesthetics.

At 9:15 the discussion was routed back to the Japanese question. An interrogation was made as to what could be done to alleviate the present conditions of race prejudices. The people and administration can both assist. There must be a program to strengthen pro-democratic ideals and the people must work towards the detriment of introvertic groups. The Government must pledge its cooperation and must present the program. Someone then states that more education is needed for the people outside rather than for those inside the camp boundaries.

At approximately 9:15 Mr. Temple began a short discussion by referring to his work with prison groups. He stated that at a certain prison there was no Negro problem when the colored people and the Caucasians were mixed together; whereas, when the colored people were segregated from the rest, riots were instigated. Routing the discussion back to the Japanese, Mr. Temple expressed his hope that about 25% of the people in the various centers will be permanently relocated within a twelve-month period. This led to a discussion of permanent relocation.

About this time, coffee was served.

At about 9:30 someone brought up the point of college relocation, and this was discoursed--Mrs. Satterlee contributed here "bright" remarks. Then, Mr. Temple said that the wise thing for the evacuees to do is to move early and if at all possible, before the end of the war.

Mrs. Satterlee piped in with a question regarding repatriation of Japanese. This commenced a free for all discussion in which the ship, "S. S. Gripsholm," was mentioned. Mr. Temple disclosed the fact that about twelve families were notified a month ago that the ship was to sail for Japan via other ports. The F.B.I. and the Income Tax people investigated these families; however, the ship did not sail. The reason given was that the ship was not guaranteed safe passage by Germany when the course was charted to pass through waters near Africa.

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At 9:40 Mr. Cerguson broke in the conversation and restated the fact that discussions such as these were promoted in the hopes that they would needle people into looking into the problems which are facing the Japanese people. He then led the audience into the applauding of the head cook.

The meeting broke up into small groups at 9:45 and about an hour later, we were all chased out.

P?H.K.